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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PARM](#) [NO](#)  
SUBJECT: U.S. FORCE REDUCTIONS IN EUROPE: VIEW FROM NORWAY

REF: USNATO 329 AND CANAVAN/HEG EMAIL 13 SEPT 2009

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires James T. Heg for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: The removal of two Brigade Combat Teams and one and a half fighter squadrons from Europe to the United States would likely provoke Norwegian angst over the effectiveness of the U.S. commitment to NATO and to Europe in general, just as Norway is promoting increased NATO engagement in the "near abroad" or core areas. Norway has high hopes that NATO will engage in the High North, to balance out increased Russian military activity, and to ensure NATO remains relevant to the Norwegian public. U.S. force reductions at NATO's center would visibly erode our ability to operate with our allies and to respond to contingencies in NATO's core area. The GON's efforts to convince Norwegians that their involvement in NATO operations in Afghanistan are worth the cost could weaken if NATO's relevance to Norway's own security were to be thrown into doubt. End Summary.

Norway's commitments abroad predicated on U.S. commitment to NATO

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¶2. (C) Despite its small size (approximately 4.7 million inhabitants), Norway has been a significant partner in international operations and has been a steadfast NATO supporter from the treaty's inception. A recent Gallup poll showed Norway to have one of the highest public levels of support for NATO in the alliance, and the Norwegian government has repeatedly stated that NATO remains the cornerstone of Norway's security and defense policy. It has approximately 600 troops assigned to NATO's operations in Afghanistan, and has various other commitments in the Balkans and a UN field hospital in Chad; Most recently, Norway's Fridjthof Nansen frigate departed Norway for the Gulf of Aden off the coast of Somalia as part of the EU ATALANTA anti-piracy operation.

¶3. (S/NF) Norwegians value their international commitments and their outsized role in global affairs afforded by their wealth. Foreign and defense policies have received minimal attention during Norway's national election campaign this summer, given the near universal agreement among political parties on the way forward. Their military commitments abroad are grounded in Norway's steadfast belief in Article 5 and the commitment of NATO allies to defend Norway. A reduction in U.S. forces in Europe would stir a Norwegian debate on the U.S. ability to respond to contingencies in NATO's core areas, and in turn lead to Norway pondering its own ability to engage in Afghanistan, if it were at the expense of its own security and self-defense.

Norway's High North and Article 5

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¶4. (C) The High North is one of the top foreign and domestic policy objectives for Norway, as it holds the keys to Norway's future energy and economic growth. Their interest and worry about economic and security developments in the High North are re-affirmed almost daily by new reports of melting ice and the opening of shipping lanes. Two German cargo ships are currently undertaking the first commercial effort in history to navigate the North East Passage, a route which if viable, could radically alter shipping and commerce between Asia and Europe.

¶5. (C) Norway sees its relationship with Russia as key to the entire region, and regards its smooth bilateral cooperation with Russia as one of its success stories. At the same time, Norway views increases in Russian military activities in the Arctic area with concern, and welcomes U.S. and NATO attention and involvement in the region as a counterweight to Russia's increasing presence and military activity. Norway's decision to purchase Joint Strike Fighters (JSF) over the Swedish Gripen aircraft was due in part to the JSF's capability to operate in the High North, demonstrating again the importance of the region to Norway's future.

¶6. (SBU) In its 2008 Core Areas Initiative non-paper to NATO on strengthening NATO, Norway specifically citing the challenges in the High North and its relationship with Russia, with the underlying message that increased NATO attention to the high north would be beneficial. Deputy Minister of Defense Espen Barth Eide noted in 2009 that NATO has a very important role in the High North, and that Norway

OSLO 00000564 002 OF 002

would like to see a higher NATO profile, including planned training activities, exercises, and visits.

¶7. (S/NF) The Norwegian government, just reelected for a likely further four years, is firmly committed to NATO. Since the end of the Cold War, and especially since the U.S. withdrawal from Keflavik in 2006, Norway has undertaken virtually unaided and with very limited forces of its own, the task of monitoring and securing NATO's northern flank, plus the extensive sea areas to the north and west. (The distance from Kristiansand to the Russian border is over 1000 miles as the crow flies, and Norway is responsible for a sea area that is seven times its land mass). Although not strictly under NATO's purview, the Svalbard archipelago, 500 miles above the North Cape, and featuring a treaty-protected Russian presence, factors into Norway's security concerns. Norway also has unresolved maritime border issues with Russia in the Barents Sea. The Norwegians place significant importance on the Article 5 guarantee to ensure that NATO (especially the U.S.) would come to its aid if necessary. Strategically sophisticated, the Norwegians understand that our ability to assist from CONUS on NATO's northern flank depends critically on NATO's center holding in place. Withdrawal of two U.S. brigade groups and 1.5 fighter squadrons from Germany would weaken the alliance's center, and thereby put the NATO northern flank further back in the strategic queue.

¶7. (S/NF) Comment: If the U.S. further draws down forces from Europe, Norway's defense policy-makers would likely interpret the force reduction as a signal that the security of Europe in general and of Norway in particular have suffered a downgrade among U.S. strategic priorities. Coming at a time when Russian military activity in the North is on the upswing, this could quickly lead to a renewed debate in Norway over the issue of whether to remain in Afghanistan, Chad, Sudan, and the Balkans, or whether to re-allocate resources toward homeland defense. End Comment.

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